DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 116 468 FL 007 343

AUTHOR Di Pietro, Robert, Ed.
TITLE Interfaces: Linguistics and Psychoanalysis, No. 4.
PUB DATE Dec 75
NOTE 9p.; For related document, see Fl 007 297
AVAILABLE FROM Robert Di Pietro, Dept. of Linguistics, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. 20057 (free)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS Bilingualism; Deep Structure; English (Second Language); Group Relations; Idioms; Italian; Language Instruction; *Language Usage; Newsletters; *Psychiatry; *Psycholinguistics; Psychology; Psychotherapy; Puns; *Second Language Learning; *Semantics; Sociolinguistics; Student Behavior; Verbal Communication; Verbs
IDENTIFIERS Code Switching (Languages)

ABSTRACT

This newsletter reports on phenomena at the intersection of linguistics and psychoanalysis and psychiatry. This issue consists of the following articles: (1) an editorial entitled "The Many (Inter)Faces of Language," by Robert Di Pietro--observations on various approaches to the study of language, particularly psycholinguistics; (2) a request for reading lists in linguistics which might be helpful to people in the medical sciences, particularly psychiatrists and psychoanalysts; (3) "Kick the Bucket is Not an Idiom," by Charles Ruhl--a semantic interpretation of this euphemism; (4) "Response to 'Language Dreaming,'" by Roger Wescott--on word associations people tend to make, and (5) a list of puns. The sixth section consists of summaries of three papers given at the panel on "Pscychoanalytic Contributions to Second Language Learning," held at the ACTFL convention, November 29, 1975, in Washington, D.C.: (a) "Language Code Switching in Bilingual Psychotherapy: A Preliminary Report:" by A. D'Amore; (b) "On Generalizing Meaning" by C. Ruhl; (c) an untitled paper, by Earl W. Stevick, dealing with a student's self-image and behavior in the language class. The general discussion following the presentations is also summarized. The newsletter ends with announcements about conferences, meetings and new books. (TL)

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I N T E R F A C E S

Linguistics and Psychoanalysis Number 4, Dec. 1975

Editor: Robert Di Pietro, Dep't of Linguistics, Georgetown University
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We desparately need a linguistics which gives the study of language use a separate status from that of language form. The familiar analogy of language to a game does not go far enough. Those who play the language game may know the rules, but, in addition, they have developed a number of personal verbal strategies which they use in various ways not only to win the game but also to display their own dispositions to the other players. Not only the psychoanalyst but also the student of group interaction can help the linguist develop the new analytical framework necessary to expand linguistic study beyond the confines of conventional linguistic grammars.

RDP

2. NEEDED: Reading lists in linguistics for psychiatrists and psychoanalysts (and others in the medical sciences) who would desire an introduction to the field. At this time there are various study groups in the country who are dedicated to understanding the basic tenents of linguistics. We invite representatives of such groups to send in their choices of books and articles, with annotations. Let's use INTERFACES as a forum to exchange ideas on the subject.

Also of interest would be a list of readings in psychoanalytic theory and in group dynamics for linguists.

3. Featured Article: KICK THE BUCKET IS NOT AN IDIOM. Charles Ruhl, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia.

The construction kick the bucket in the sense 'die' is often cited as a typical idiom. By definition, an idiom is a syntactic construction whose parts do not have the meanings they have in any other constructions. In the literal version of kick the bucket, kick and bucket can be assigned meanings identical to those assigned in other constructions; it appears, however, that they can not have such general meanings in a construction whose sum meaning is 'die'.

But appearances are deceiving. There are two other constructions meaning 'die' which involve kick: kick off and kick in. In a recent Steve Roper comic strip, Mike Nomad is held hostage by a man who instructs him to say over the telephone: Please pay off! Or I kick off! Also, Connie Eble recently overheard a nurse complaining about having sole charge of a geriatric ward: I had to take care of the whole floor, and people were kicking off left and right. Since kick occurs in three constructions meaning 'die', it is not idiomatic (although the bucket probably is).

This use of kick is puzzling if we do not recognize the METONYMIC status of these constructions: they do not refer directly to death, but to some contingent quality or situation. Two proposed origins of kick the bucket illustrate this: in one, pigs about to be slaughtered, hanging suspended from a beam of wood (bucket originally meant 'beam':

a metonymic semantic change), kicked the beam as a nervous reflex when they were killed; in the other, a man about to be hung (perhaps suicide), rope around his neck, standing on a bucket, died when the bucket was kicked from under him. (In addition, I recall my first attempt to analyze this phrase occurred when I was milking cows; if the cow kicked the bucket, the milk was spoiled, 'killed'. Note that a metonymic analysis was quite natural for me to make).

A metonymic analysis may seem only a special contrivance for this occasion; but there are a number of English constructions which can best be explained as examples of metonymy. Borkin (1972) cites constructions she calls 'beheaded noun phrases', where a noun refers to something contingent to it: I'm parked at the corner (= my car); Turn up the HI-FI (= the sound of the hi-fi); CHOMSKY is too difficult to read (= Chomsky's writings); HANOI has refused to cooperate (= the government of the country whose capital is Hanoi); THE WHOLE APARTMENT HOUSE has hepititis (=all of the people in the apartment house). Consider also euphemisms like go to bed with and sleep with, which refer to situations contingent to sexual intercourse. Also, 'polite imperatives' such as Will you pass the butter? and Can you tell me the time?, and expressions such as I have to go when one is actually going, or invitations such as Would you like to come to the party? These and a number of other constructions demonstrate that indirect reference, metonymy, is quite common in language (see Ruhl, to appear, for more examples and discussion).

However, even granting a metonymic status for the three kick-constructions, the use of kick is still mysterious since it appears to have no connection with the 'literal' kick, the action of the leg and foot, nor any clearly definable sense at all. However, consider some other uses of kick: kick up a storm, kick against the traces, kick against the pricks, He really kicked about it, The gun kicked, Kick up one's heels, and noun examples such as He doesn't have any kick coming, This whiskey has a kick to it, and He's on an ecology kick. One way to unify these 'metaphorical' meanings with the literal one is to interpret the ability to kick as evidence of a human's (or anything's) ability to have an impact, to make a difference, to complain or protest, to be fully alive and forceful and decisive as a human can be—not just alive as a vegetable, but alive and kicking. A linguistic analysis can be most fruitful if it does not hastily make distinctions such as literal-metaphorical, concrete-abstract, and even mind-body; and it can use profitably the insights of a psychotherapeutic approach which sees mind and body linked and interdependent. For Lowen (1972), the ability to kick is the ability to be well-grounded in reality, to be able to feel and express feelings, especially of rage and anger:

> The simplest way to get a person to express feelings is to have him kick his legs into the bed and say 'No' in a sustained and loud voice. Every patient has something to kick about, some protest to voice, and this is especially true of depressed patients. But they more than others have suppressed

> their negative feelings. When Joan kicked the bed, her movements were mechanical, her voice lacked conviction. Since she could not pretend she had nothing to kick about, I was able to confront her with the fact that she had suppressed her feelings (p. 105).

(We can also note that the first sign of life from a child in the womb is a kick). The phrase kick the bucket can be interpreted in this light. The expression is disrespectful, but in a backhanded way: if we use it, we adopt a callous and irreverent tone, but we also create the impression that the person died, not passively and inertly, but with some active force or impact. (The pigs kicking the beam can be seen as protesting their death.) Perhaps death is so inherently a passive and solemn event that we can give it an active tone only by being callous and irreverent. (Note also the decisive finality, as in kick the habit).

These remarks are only suggestive, intending to open interpretive possibilities rather than to settle questions prematurely. They assume that the human mind is much more complex than merely being logical, scientific, conscious, practical, literal, and even communicational. We still can only suspect what the subconscious abilities of humans are, and we often seem deaf--in a scientific-mechanistic culture--to the evidence of literature that the mind is always in free play, inventing and imagining, in ways which are much more extravagant than would be necessary for communication or what we call knowledge.

Borkin Ann (1972) Coreference and Beheaded NP's, Papers in Linguistics 5:1.
Lowen, Alexander (1972) Depression and the Body: The Biological Basis of Faith and Reality, Pelican Books.
Ruhl, Charles (to appear) Pragmatic Metonymy, The Second LACUS Forum.

4. Response to 'Language Dreaming' by Roger Wescott, INTERFACES no. 3:

On nurd and snurd, if the sequence of my learning the two words is significant, the latter probably influenced the former rather than the reverse. I would guess snurd to be a respelling of Edgar Bergen's character Mortimer Snerd, who was an archetypical snurd. That goes back twenty or thirty years in my recollection, whereas I learned nurd only a couple of years ago. Mortimer, as old Bergen fans will remember, was a cousin or something of Charlie McCarthy, Bergen's famous dummy.

I wonder if the Freudians are interested so much in elucidating mysteries as in creating them. One gets the sensation that they are always looking for some demiurge to explain things, rather than looking at or for the simplest possible explanation, such as associative mechanisms in the brain. In my own writing I am conscious all the time of assimilatory mechanisms that cause me to choose, for example, the member of a synonymic pair that bears the closest resemblance to some other word in the context, usually completely irrelevant in meaning.

For instance, if I have just been saying context and I have to express the idea of attentiveness, I am apt to choose consciousness rather than awareness. Most of the time, in writing, I find that my task is to root out the similar-sounding words because I feel that the best style is the most contrasty style. Particularly frequent and annoying is the choice of a homonym, or the use of the 'same' word in a slightly different sense, with the span of a sentence or of two adjoining sentences. I've used some examples of this in the new final chapter of my revision of Aspects.'

Dwight Bolinger

5. Several INTERFACES readers sent in puns, as a follow-up to the editorial in our last issue. Suzanne Ramey Legault supplied a newspaper article on the reduction in size and quality of toilet paper which contained the following: 'Lowering the quality of the product would have struck a body blow at a heretofore unassailable example of the superiority of the American Way, working incalculable mischief on a national psyche already rubbed raw by political...crises.' Your editor also found a newspaper item about a woman wrestler who weighs 349 pounds. She flies to San Francisco once a month to wrestle at the Cow Palace. From Fred van der Wens comes the notice of a book which 'probes the heretofore murky waters of the Submarine High Command.' Fred also supplied a newspaper quip that 'you don't have to be a cannibal to get fed up with people'.

6. NEWS ITEM: PANEL ON 'PSYCHOANALYTIC CONTRIBUTIONS TO SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING HELD AT ACTFL CONVENTION, NOVEMBER 29, 1975, THE WASHINGTON HILTON, WASHINGTON, D.C.

The participants were: Robert J. Di Pietro (Moderator), Arcangelo D'Amore, M. D., Charles Ruhl, and Earl Stevick. More than 50 persons were in attendance, including language teachers from the U. S. and other countries. Persons interested in obtaining the full text of each paper may contact the ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, Center for Applied Linguistics, 1611 N. Kent Street, Arlington, Virginia 22209. The following are brief summaries of the papers:

1. 'Language Code Switching in Bilingual Psychotherapy: A Prelim. Report' (A. D'Amore, M. D.)

The verbal part of psychotherapy is usually conducted entirely in the language spoken where the patient and the therapist are living. However, the situation sometimes occurs when the patient and the therapist are bilingual in the same languages. This paper is a preliminary report of Italian-English code switching as I have observed it in my psychiatric practice. Features of six cases are discussed. Among the conclusions drawn from them are: (1) English, as the second language learned at an older age, can be used to bolster ego control and mastery in interpersonal relations. (2) It can

also be used defensively in an attempt to remain conflict-free, and as part of a flight into reality. (3) Italian as the mother tongue is conflict-laden and associated with the childhood experiences of vulnerability, dependency and helplessness. (4) Ambivalent feelings of love and hate are more affect-laden in Italian. (5) A bilingual person, experiencing the intertwining of libidinal and aggressive drives, is prone to an attempt at conflict resolution by splitting himself along the language cleavage. Ego synthesis and a sturdy sense of ego-identity are interfered with. In such circumstances, psychotherapeutic intervention by a bilingual psychotherapist or psychoanalyst may prove advantageous.

2. 'On Generalizing Meaning' (C. Ruhl, Old Dominion University).

In teaching a language, our goal is to provide as much general understanding as possible, so that the student is not forced to learn the language by memorizing every single fact. But in trying to get at the generalities of language we are apt to make two different mistakes: (1) a misjudgment of the generalities of the language, overlooking some and creating bogus ones and (2) an improper presentation of these generalities to the students so that they do not grasp them. To avoid these errors, we must realize that most of our native language ability was acquired long before we were conscious of what we were learning. While we teachers are aware that the students must learn more than what we consciously teach them, we secretly hope for the day when we would understand a language so well that we could spell out everything for the student. The source of this secret hope is the misapprehension that a language is completely rational. I have collected over 1800 sentences with the verb break, in order to demonstrate how many particular things the subconscious mind can conceive of as breaking--many more than the conscious mind ever could. The massive data is convincing evidence that there is really a single meaning for break which cannot be defined or understood by rational means. In teaching such verbs, we must lead the student to see the total range of possibilities of uses. Giving many examples spurs the student's subconscious to work. The ability to be creative with language in new and particular situations comes from the generalizing power of the subconscious mind.

3. (Untitled). Earl W. Stevick, Foreign Service Institute, Dept. of State.

A student's self-image is his most precious possession. Yet this image is constantly threatened in a language class (or anywhere else). Some threats come from the foreignness of the language, others from the power imbalance between student and teacher, others from fellow students, and others from the student's failure to live up to what he expects of himself. All of these threats produce various kinds of defensive behavior, which interfere with the quality as well as with the quantity of learning. Teachers should try to run their courses in ways which will reduce these threats. A general strategy might include three elements: (1) trying to maximize student security; (2) arranging for students to study in

ways that maximize their own self-investment in the enterprise; (3) allowing students, as much as possible, to learn from themselves and from one another, rather than directly from the teacher. These three elements are compatible with one another if the teacher concentrates on establishing and maintaining classroom routines, and on making necessary information available when needed; and allows the students a large amount of responsibility for who says what to whom, and when.

In the discussion following the presentations, the panel was asked why students who demonstrate high ability in all other subjects continue to do poorly in foreign language courses. One panelist felt that the initial orientation along with the pressure to become a member of an alien group is very trying for the student. Another believed that the anxiety comes from within, as a result of the superego's high ideals, or from parental pressure to achieve. It was stated that both student and teacher are learners, thus de-emphasizing the distinction often made between the two, in which the student may come to represent the id, and the teacher, the superego. A member of the audience commented that often times there exists an alienation when a student is forced to take a certain subject to fulfill a degree requirement. In response to a related question, it was emphasized that making students aware of specific terms (such as ego, alienation, etc.) would probably not help to alleviate any tenseness between teacher and student in such a situation. A positive language-learning experience may be described as ego-syntonic, i.e., one that reinforces and strengthens what a person is. It was further emphasized that there is a need for personalization in language learning. In order to minimize the possibility of alienation, the target-language experience should effectively relate to each individual's needs. Internalization of the language over a period of time is regarded as a sort of 'de-alienation'.

Dr. D'Amore, the psychoanalyst on the panel, was asked if recent bilingual arrivals in the U. S. demonstrate the same defense mechanisms that are evidenced in the speech of immigrants who have resided here for a longer period of time. He responded that the evidence cited in his paper was compiled from patients who have been here from three months to as long as 30 years. He sees language as an integral part of culture, and code-switching as a reflection of the influence of adjustments and new experiences. A cultural shift permits parallel shifts in the ego, super-ego, and the total self-image. The majority of recent Italian arrivals do not speak dialects, but rather the standard language. As a result, there is less of a cultural gap now than there was 20 years ago. A language learned as an adult is associated with maturity and prestige. Most bilingual patients in this country identify with English in this manner.

prepared by Nancy Lee Schweda,
Georgetown University

7. NEWS ITEMS:

The Institute for Vico Studies (69 Fifth Avenue, Suite 17-A, New York, N. Y. 10003) will hold a conference on VICO AND CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT (January 27-31, 1976). Among the many panels set up to explore Vico's influence on contemporary fields are the following: Vico and Psychology, Vico and Anthropology, and Vico and Linguistics. The speakers include Rollo May, Donald Verene, Silvano Arieti (who will speak on Vico's suggestions to psychiatrists), Noam Chomsky, Robert Di Pietro, and Roger Wescott. For further information, write to Dr. Giorgio Tagliacozzo at the address given above.

The next interest group meeting on linguistics and psychoanalysis at Georgetown University will be held, as usual, at the time of the annual Georgetown Roundtable on Languages and Linguistics. The dates are March 11, 12, 13, 1976. All interest groups will meet for three hours on Thursday, March 11th. We are planning to dedicate this group meeting to the dynamics of language use in groups. Other ideas are also invited. For further information about the meeting contact: Dr. Clea Rameh, School of Languages and Linguistics, Georgetown University, Washington, D. C. 20057. Ask about the Georgetown Roundtable Meeting and she will send you all the pertinent information.

The First National Conference on Rational Psychotherapy was held at the Lewis University School of Law in Chicago, June 6-8th, 1975. Over 400 professionals and non-professionals were in attendance. For additional information on the proceedings of the conference, contact Dr. Janet Wolfe, 45 East 65th. Street, N. Y. 10021.

Through direct communication with the author, I learned that Dr. Marshall Edelson's new book Language and Interpretation in Psychoanalysis is to be published this fall by the Yale University Press.

Prof. Michael J. Reddy of Columbia University has sent our Archives two papers: 'A Functional Typology of Puns' and 'Formal Referential Models of Poetic Structure'. Both deal with multiplicity of meaning in poetry. Those interested in this subject can contact Prof. Reddy at the Dept. of English and Comparative Literature, Columbia Univ., New York 10027.

Mrs. L. Smith of Waterloo, Ontario writes of her own experience in code-switching and language use. Her family speaks German, Spanish, and English. While they sometimes mix all three languages in one sentence, the syntax of the sentence will be correct for only one of the languages. Certainly code-switching does not affect all components of language in the same ways. More research needs to be done in this area.

H A P P Y H O L I D A Y S !